

Sofie Lakmaker, *De geschiedenis van mijn seksualiteit* ('The History of My Sexuality')

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Translated by Emma Rault

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My Mother Is a Patrilineal Jew

My mother always said: 'We don't have rich friends, they just bought a house at the right time.' My parents bought their house at exactly the right time: on Jacob Obrechtstraat, number 7—*right* in the middle of Oud-Zuid. Someone once said that there are two types of people in Amsterdam Oud-Zuid: the nouveau riche and Jewish intellectuals. We weren't nouveau riche, she kept telling me, and we weren't Jewish—my mother was only a *patrilineal Jew*, and when I asked my father at one point what an intellectual was, he said: 'The only true intellectual is Wilfred Oranje.'

Wilfred Oranje, I learned, was 'the translator who brought Sigmund Freud's work into Dutch.' When I was twenty I ended up living in his old apartment for a while—as he was dead by that point—and when I woke up in the morning I'd see hundreds of volumes of Freud all around me. I didn't last very long there. I wanted to become an intellectual too, but every time I tried to read a book I would fall asleep. That's just the way it is: when I spend too long staring at the work of men who resemble Sigmund Freud, I fall asleep—I can't help it.

Between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two, I tried to take in all kinds of Sigmund Freuds, an exercise which ultimately left me with just one clearly describable feeling: that I wasn't Sigmund Freud. Or, to be more precise: that I wasn't a man, but a woman. I had a *very* hard time with that—with being a woman. They wanted me to grow my hair out. Of course no one ever said that out loud, but when people are trying to shove something down your throat, they don't tend to put it into words. They let you *know*.

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Now I have very short hair and I'm in a support group for transgender people. If you'd like to know more about that, feel free to give me a call. I'm not really transgender at all, I'm just someone who likes penetrating women and is sick of having to buy *devices* for that all the time. Those things are expensive as hell and half the time you don't know what you're doing, because somehow that astronomically priced appliance has slipped out of place. You know what I'm sick of? Things being out of place.

Of course, I could have also tried reading books by people who *didn't* resemble Sigmund Freud—women, for example, or men of color. Or better yet: women of color. But the thing is, they're never part of the canon. The freaking canon. I can hear you thinking, 'But Woolf is part of the canon. Baldwin is part of the canon.' I'll be very honest with you: I keep meaning to buy one of Baldwin's books, and Virginia Woolf sent me to sleep too. Right after she went out to buy those flowers, I fell asleep.

I was about seventeen when I first started to think about becoming a genius. But the trouble with genius is it's kind of like being gay—it's not something you *become*, it's something it turns out you are. At least that's what they say. Personally I believe that all the geniuses were just people who were somehow able to not answer their phone when the world called to bother them, so that they could focus on making something that it turned out was exactly what the world needed. Either way, a lot of the time *I* didn't answer my phone either—so often, in fact, that eventually my female friends just gave up. They started gossiping about me. They said I was basically no good, and that I *had* to be a lesbian because of the way I looked at Zahra. They were right, on all counts.

Because my female friends had dumped me, I started spending more and more time with Felix and Chiel. At our very white, very upper-crust high school, they were the whitest

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and the upper-crustiest, and I kind of liked that. During the breaks, Chiel always said the same thing: 'So is this *it?*'—after which Felix would nod. I nodded too, though I didn't know what, exactly, he was talking about. I only knew he was right, because they always were—the white, upper-crust types. I, for my part, was rarely right, and I have to tell you, that got to be hard after a while.

I was wrong about pretty much everything, truth be told. About the boys and the girls, about the right answer and—much more importantly—the right question. You can have as many answers as you like, but if you're lacking the right question, you'll still just be talking into the void. I've learned *that* much. What I've learned is that any question is preceded by answers. And as long as they're not right, *you're* not going to be right either.

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What Do You Think This Is, *Blue Is the Warmest Color*?

Blue Is the Warmest Color is a 2013 movie about a fifteen-year-old girl from the French town of Lille who falls head-over-heels in love with another girl. The first time I saw it was not long after Douchebag D. and I had ended things, and I sobbed uncontrollably because of how powerfully the movie conveys the sense of loneliness that follows a breakup. Truth be told, *Blue Is the Warmest Color* conveys *every* feeling very powerfully, or at least every feeling that's worth having. If life only lasted three hours, you should just put *Blue* on: that way you'd still get to experience everything.

However, since it's three hours and seven minutes long, that would unfortunately mean missing the final seven minutes. So let me recap them for you: Adèle goes to see her Great Love's art exhibition. They've broken up by this point, but Adèle features in many of the paintings. She runs into her Great Love's new girlfriend, who looks at her with big eyes and says 'See? You're still here.'

Moments later, a guy comes up to her. He first appeared in the movie an hour earlier, and we know he's had a crush on her from the start. He starts a conversation with her, but a friend taps him on the shoulder and Adèle makes her way outside. In the next shot you see the guy trying to find her again in the crowd, but she's already left. She turns the corner and lights a cigarette, and then the end credits roll.

Anyway, this run-down doesn't tell you very much, but if you've seen the three hours leading up to that moment, you'll probably cry just as hard as I did at the time. This is the best line from *Blue is the Warmest Color*: 'Je t'aime plus, mais j'ai une infinie tendresse pour

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toi, et je l'aurai toujours—toute ma vie.' It means something like 'I no longer love you, but I feel an infinite tenderness for you, and I always will.' A stunning line. When I left the cinema, I immediately wrote it down in a letter to Douchebag D. I wrote, 'I probably still love you, but above all I feel an infinite tenderness.'

Douchebag D. wrote back telling me he was impressed by my words, but he didn't really say anything about the tenderness part. Maybe that was the moment when I decided to become an incredible writer, and to forget about that tenderness for the time being.

I must've seen *Blue* about thirty-one times in total. The movie contains very lengthy sex scenes, and the first time I saw it I almost completely missed them. In movie theaters I always sit in the second row, because no one else ever wants to sit there, which means I can make all the faces I want. But it just so happened that on that particular afternoon I did have a guy sitting next to me who, the moment a sex scene began, would start staring fixedly at his toes. I tend to be quite sensitive to my surroundings, so when he did that I did it too. Except I can pretty much draw a map of my own toes, so I started staring at *his* toes instead.

That's why after seeing *Blue* for the first time I still knew nothing about lesbian sex, just everything about a bunch of toes that, at the end of the day, left me cold. Now, I need to tell you guys something very important: even if you *didn't* spend those scenes staring at the toes of the guy sitting next to you, and actually paid attention to the sex scenes themselves, it's debatable whether you would actually know any more about lesbian sex than you did before. I, for one, don't know *anyone* who does it like that.

To begin with, Adèle and Emma—her Great Love—are *constantly* going down on each other. I don't do that: I go down on people *sometimes*. Also, there's a kind of symmetry to their sex—as if you get each other off in exactly the same way just because, biologically

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speaking, you're both part of the same group. That's nonsense, know what I mean?

And if you get each other off in a less symmetrical way, that's not because one of you is the *man* and the other the *woman*. It's just because one of you is called Marissa and the other is called Lisan. That's why. I should add, though, that I really *am* the man in bed, and the other person is, without exception, the woman—but that's not how it works for everyone. Fucking straights—you gotta teach them everything.

And yet there was a time when I, too, had no idea how it was all supposed to work. Sex, I mean. Back after Jennifer had thrown me out, I was just wandering around aimlessly. I thought about Jasper Krabbé and Amélie, and I wondered what show she was watching now. But mainly I thought about the sex I'd had with Jennifer, and why it was I never managed to relax when she said, 'Hey, relax.'

I came to all sorts of conclusions about that, and the most definitive one was this: that I wasn't good enough in bed, and that this was what I needed to become—good in bed. Or, to be more precise: *masterful*—that's what I vowed to be. If you want to become masterful at something, you need a teacher. And when I thought about it, I realized she'd been there from the beginning: Roos.

Roos was the captain of my soccer team and a born leader. She always said, 'Lakmaker, you gotta stop spending so much time in that *head* of yours.' But at the end of the day she understood my head very well. Those are the best kinds of people: the ones who understand your head, but who can also tell you when you need to get out of it for a bit. Every time I was off my game or feeling down after practice, she'd come up to me and say, 'Dushi, be real with me.' Now that's what I like—people you can just be real with.

Roos had a gold tooth and a huge ass. She always made use of that ass when we had

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7/12

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to mark each other during practice games. If your opponent's got an ass the size of Roos', you can forget about getting control of the ball. And after a while I started noticing that she kept tugging at my shirt. Not just when we were fighting for possession, even when the ball was all the way over on the other side of the pitch. Well, let me tell you, that drove me fucking *wild*.

There's not a single stereotype about women's soccer that I will be debunking here. Except for the most deep-seated prejudice about women who play soccer: that they suck at it. Women are *amazing* soccer players. But apart from that: yes, everyone is gay, even if they say they're only gay *temporarily*, and everyone spits on the ground, some people even blow *snot* onto the ground. I know, gross, right? Almost as gross as stereotypes.

A lot of the girls on our team were temporarily gay. They'd have a girlfriend, but they'd say, 'I'm only attracted to *her*—and to men.' Hearing that always made me profoundly sad. People would rather *die* than just be into women. There were two girls on our team who were terrified of becoming gay, so they only hung out with each other. Right, you guessed it—they ended up in a passionate relationship.

For some reason, one of us kept resenting them for that. 'It's like a freaking makeover show, like they're on Henny Huisman or something,' that girl would say. I've never entirely understood what Henny Huisman had to do with it, but what she meant was: you come in here being one thing and you walk out a completely different person. And she wasn't wrong.

The gray tiles of the SC Buitenveldert sports complex were a kind of lesbian hallowed ground. Roos and I had sex in the restroom there at one point. We were shooting for locker room 17—that was the locker room of the first team, who were sponsored by ING. Everything in there was orange, and it was the only one that didn't smell like athlete's foot.

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But other people had beaten us to it. If only ING knew—they're not just bankrolling the arms trade in conflict zones, but also sex between women.

The only person who knew about all of this was Fred, our physical therapist. He treated the players on both the first and the second team, and he massaged everyone so incredibly slowly that eventually we'd end up telling him everything. He never asked any questions, he just nodded. Fred was the de facto counsellor for the team. We also had an official one, Gerrie, but everyone always gave him a wide berth, because he always wanted to *go deeper*.

I think I was the only player in the Buitenveldert squad who didn't mind that so much. But the problem with me and Gerrie was we couldn't seem to get *past* that depth. We'd look at each other for a long time and then finally he'd say, 'Soph, you need to stop *thinking* so much.' A little tip for counsellors: try to actually *engage* with the thoughts people are having before telling them to shut up. If you just want to tell people to shut up, you're better off becoming a coach.

Gerrie ended up getting fired after it was unanimously decided he wasn't going to be any help to us. In his little goodbye speech he referred to the practice game against Ajax we'd be playing the following week. He said, 'Girls, this is a once-in-a-lifetime event.' See, I find those kinds of statements so exhausting. I can't stand it when people tell me something is a once-in-a-lifetime event. And besides, we actually played practice games against professional teams pretty often. It *wasn't* a once-in-a-lifetime event, you know what I mean? But Gerrie was always intent on making things heavier. That's why everyone wanted him to leave. Gerrie was like Wagner played on the nineties nostalgia station. It just didn't *fit*.

During his speech I was sitting next to Roos, and while we were all looking at Gerrie,

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she slowly started squeezing my thigh. Not hard, but with some feeling. That got me all worked up again, so once Gerrie had wrapped up his speech I said, 'There's a Hungarian movie playing right now that I find very intriguing.' Of course, what I meant was: 'Wanna fuck?' But I'm too chicken-shit to say that sort of thing. Honest to God: I just don't have the guts.

A week later we met up at Eye. We arrived late, and as we were walking into the theater the usher stopped us because she didn't believe I was sixteen. She said, 'Young man, this movie is for people aged sixteen and over.' It was very strange. Not the fact that she didn't believe I was sixteen, because people rarely do, but that she said 'young man.' I don't think anyone says that anymore. People usually just say 'sir' or 'hey, buddy.'

I showed her my cinema pass with my date of birth on it, but she didn't seem to find that very convincing. It wasn't until I showed her my passport that she nodded, with a big frown. People always nod with a big frown when they see my passport. That's because they think I'm a fifteen-year-old boy, and then it turns out I'm in my mid-twenties and I'm a woman. Sometimes they think my passport is fake, and they'll say, 'Nice passport you've got there, buddy.' I've started toying with the idea of actually *getting* a fake passport: 'Jozias Lakmaker, born in Amsterdam on April 29th, 2005.' Buying beer would be a no-go, but at least I'd be normal. There are days when that seems more important than beer.

In hindsight, I *was* too young for that movie, and the same may have been true for Roos. *Son of Saul* is set in 1944 and is about a guy who is part of a Sonderkommando in the Auschwitz gas chambers. A little tip for first dates: don't go see a movie about the Sonderkommando. Or do anything else that's related to the Sonderkommando, for that matter. I'd just avoid the Sonderkommando altogether, on a first date.

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De Volkskrant described *Son of Saul* as 'a reconstruction of hell,' and that pretty much sums it up. Afterwards, when Roos asked me what I wanted to drink, I said, 'Nothing.' I had the same issue after reading Primo Levi's *If This Is a Man*. I no longer wanted to eat anything. 'Death begins with the shoes,' he wrote, referring to the crucial choice of footwear in Auschwitz. People who were given the wrong size often ended up dying from all the problems that started accumulating in their feet. After reading that I spent an entire winter walking around the house barefoot to get some idea of the cold they'd felt there.

Of course that's a weird-ass thing to do, and I finally stopped once my mother got wind of it. She asked, 'Have you completely lost your mind?' My mother named me after her grandmother, who was gassed in Auschwitz on her own birthday. If you ask me, that sounds like a good starting point for completely losing your mind.

Roos lived on Mercator Square and when we walked into her apartment it turned out she didn't have any furniture. 'I love what you've done with the place,' I said—but she'd already started kissing me. I wanted to break the ice, but for Roos there was no such thing as ice. She said, 'Fuck me before my roommate gets home.' That got me pretty stressed out. And you know what the funny thing was? The roommate never did come home. And I mean never. It wouldn't be the first time that I encountered this phenomenon: roommates who are never home. Where on Earth *are* those people?

The only piece of furniture in her living room was a sofa. She pushed me down onto it and proceeded to remove her clothes at lightning speed. Every now and then people will be talking about sex and they'll say, 'It just happened.' That's how I experience it too. Except I kind of experience it like it's *Son of Saul*, you know what I mean? I find myself thinking: what on Earth is *happening* here? And the nice thing about *Son of Saul* is at least you can just

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sit back and watch. But you can't get away with that in sex. They always want you to *participate*. If there's one thing I hate, it's participating in sex.

As I was sitting on that sofa, she pushed her breasts into my face. I found that quite agreeable. And Roos had these unbelievably large breasts. But I didn't want to get out from underneath them after that. I thought: ok, bye, talk to you later. But you just can't get away with that during sex. She pulled her breasts off my face, and that's when she asked The Question. 'So what do *you* like?'

Of all the questions in the world, I think that's the one I hate the most. The real honest answer probably would have been: 'For you to keep your fucking hands to yourself?' But you can't *say* that sort of thing. It's kind of like standing in the middle of the pitch during a game and asking, 'Listen, any chance we can just do without that ball?' It's just not possible. You try it.

See, I'm not afraid to tell you guys all of this stuff, but there was no way I was going to tell *her*. God no. So I kind of hemmed and hawed, and then I started going down on her. I don't really care that much what happens during sex—as long as *I'm* not there. That's why I just went and found a new place to disappear into. And at the risk of sounding a little full of myself, I made her come. And a few hours later I made her come *again*. See, that kind of thing can really put a little grin on my face sometimes.

After she'd come the second time, I slowly started giving her little butterfly kisses. I think that's a suitable way to end sex: butterfly kisses. Roos gave me a searching look and said, 'What are you doing?'

'I'm giving you butterfly kisses,' I said. She turned away from me. Then she sat up straight and fixed me with her gaze. 'What do you think this is, *Blue Is the Warmest Color*?'

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God, lesbians. They really know what movie references to pull out to make a point.

That kind of made me feel like crying, but I swallowed it down. Sometimes you can sort of swallow your tears. You just have to think about something else real quick, like all the orange in dressing room number 17, and then you'll be able to do it. I've gotten better and better at it over time. But that wasn't what I'd been hoping to learn from Roos, know what I mean? Sometimes you really end up learning the wrong things from people.